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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 03 KINSHASA 001244

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SUBJECT: NORTH KIVU HUMANITARIAN UPDATE

REF: A. KINSHASA 01217 B. KINSHASA 01188

SUMMARY

¶1. Since mid-October, a lull in major combat across most of North Kivu Province has afforded relief organizations temporary access to conflict-affected areas to assess humanitarian conditions and deliver critical food and emergency relief supplies for displaced and vulnerable populations. However, ongoing population movements, a fluid security environment, and difficult or unreliable access throughout much of Masisi and Rutshuru Territories remain significant challenges for emergency relief efforts for the 351,490 people displaced by fighting since late 2006. In response, UN agencies are working to target priority locations and populations through coordinated convoys and assistance activities. End summary.

SECURITY AND ACCESS

¶2. As of October 23, UN Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUC) security officials have reported fewer recent clashes between Mai-Mai elements, Democratic Liberation Forces of Rwanda (FDLR), Congolese military (FARDC), and troops loyal to dissident General Nkunda. Masisi Territory has remained relatively calm since October 15, when government officials extended the deadline for Nkunda's troops to join the military integration process ("brassage"). A confrontation between Mai-Mai and Nkunda groups in the Rumangabo and Bunagana area along the Uganda border on October 20 interrupted a similar lull in Rutshuru Territory.

¶3. Despite the relative calm, MONUC staff are urging the humanitarian community to exercise continued caution and state that military offensives could begin at any point. MONUC also continues to report heavy FARDC deployments to Walikale, Rutshuru, and Masisi territories.

¶4. Unreliable access remains the largest obstacle to humanitarian relief efforts in North Kivu. Both the UN World Food Program (WFP) and the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF) estimate that up to 200,000 displaced people are currently inaccessible. Relief agencies routinely face small-scale clashes, UN security constraints, and limited MONUC escorts for travel beyond the Goma-Rutshuru road. In addition, heavy rains regularly damage the poor roads and delay convoys carrying relief supplies. Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) report reluctance to travel with MONUC escorts following recent accusations that MONUC is either supporting Nkunda's troops or fighting alongside Congolese military forces.

POPULATION MOVEMENTS

¶5. Humanitarian staff report ongoing population movements as some communities return home, residents flee sporadic clashes as well as the recent fighting in the Bunagana area, and others anticipate renewed military activity. As of October 15, the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) reports that fighting has displaced 351,490 people from Masisi and Rutshuru territories since late 2006, of which 143,130 since early September. In addition, relief agencies have received unconfirmed reports of a further 151,805 people uprooted by insecurity. Based on an estimate of 1 million people in Masisi and Rutshuru territories, OCHA claims that approximately one-third of residents are currently displaced.

¶6. UNICEF reports that host communities are reaching their capacity to absorb and provide support to displaced persons. While displaced

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populations have generally settled with host families during previous episodes of insecurity, approximately 40 percent of the current IDPs are living in schools, churches, and at group settlement sites.

17. The largest concentrations of displaced persons include approximately 56,920 in the Goma area, 38,520 near Rutshuru town, and 18,495 in Kisharo, Rutshuru Territory. Preliminary reports indicate possible large-scale displacements from Bunagana, Jomba, Rumangabo, and Rugari towns near the Uganda border following fighting on October 20. Relief agencies planned to conduct humanitarian assessments of the area and verify the reported population movements.

18. The humanitarian community in Goma indicates that the fluid security environment and resulting population movements, both away from and back to areas of origin, complicate efforts to accurately track the size and priority needs of this vulnerable group. In addition to the above estimates, relief agencies have received reports of renewed returns between Kiwanja and Nyamilima, and up to 8,500 families previously displaced near Mweso arriving in the Nyanzale area in Rutshuru Territory.

PRIORITY NEEDS

19. WFP continues to express concern over high malnutrition rates among the conflict-affected population of North Kivu, particularly in Rutshuru Territory (Ref A). The protracted nature of this conflict has interrupted income-generating activities, disrupted agricultural production, and negatively impacted food security for displaced populations and their host communities throughout Masisi and Rutshuru territories.

110. In addition, the cycles of alternating calm and conflict have led to nearly continuous episodes of displacement across these territories, often affecting the same communities multiple times and leading to prolonged displacement of others. The steadily growing displaced population requires continued relief efforts to provide access to clean water, health services, sanitation facilities, and basic household supplies such as blankets, plastic sheeting, cooking utensils, and soap.

RESPONSE EFFORTS

111. Despite the difficult operating environment characterized by unpredictable security and difficult or unreliable access, UN agencies and relief organizations are engaged in ongoing emergency response activities for the large conflict-affected population of southern North Kivu. USAID-funded UNICEF has distributed emergency relief supplies to an estimated 400,000 people, and provided water and sanitation services for approximately 350,000 since late 2006. Between January 1 and October 21, WFP provided 11,453 metric tons of emergency food assistance to 627,170 in North Kivu, also with support from USAID.

112. In response to growing malnutrition concerns, WFP and UNICEF are coordinating to expand supplementary and therapeutic feeding programs, particularly in Birambizo, Mweso, and Rwanguba health zones of Rutshuru Territory. The approach targets the most vulnerable persons by providing emergency food rations to the families of malnourished children and pregnant or lactating mothers, and is equally available to displaced and resident populations. UNICEF currently supports 118 such centers across Masisi and Rutshuru. NGOs including the International Rescue Committee, International Medical Corps (IMC), and Medecins sans Frontieres are also engaged in supplementary feeding programs in Rwanguba, Karisimbi, and Masisi health zones.

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113. USAID's Office of US Foreign Disaster Assistance (OFDA) currently funds IMC to provide primary health care and referral services in the larger Goma area, and is in discussion with two additional partners to provide similar health services in Rutshuru Territory. Between September 8 and October 21, IMC consulted 13,594 patients in the immediate Goma area and admitted 1,627 malnourished children for supplementary feeding programs. OFDA also supports UNICEF's rapid response mechanism, which holds primary responsibility for monitoring humanitarian conditions, identifying priority needs, and providing the initial round of relief assistance to communities throughout North Kivu.

114. Following the resurgence in fighting and resulting displacement in early September, OFDA committed nearly USD 3 million to purchase and transport relief commodities for 100,000 people to ensure an adequate stockpile of emergency relief supplies for further anticipated displacement. OFDA staff coordinated the airlift of 319 MT of commodities on 17 flights to Goma between September 28 and October 15. UNICEF is currently transporting the first of these supplies to Nyanzale to benefit 1,329 displaced households.

115. OCHA continues to coordinate relief efforts throughout North Kivu, and the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) manages camp coordination for the displaced population in the Goma area. With guidance from OCHA, UNHCR is currently leading the effort to identify contingency sites for communities in transit between Goma-Masisi and Goma-Rutshuru, as well as exploring Kibumba, approximately 20 km north of Goma, for a site to host persons displaced from Rutshuru Territory.

COMMENT

116. OFDA staff note that earlier tension between UNHCR and both WFP and UNICEF appears to be diminishing, and WFP reports an improved working relationship and closer coordination with UNICEF (Ref B). While WFP and UNICEF continue to disagree with UNHCR over the

presence of armed security at settlement sites, the dispute did not significantly hamper the latest WFP food distributions at the Goma sites.

17. Recent coordinated convoys of food and medical supplies are another positive indication of recent cooperation between various relief agencies. Following the extended government deadline for dissident troops to join the brassage process, OCHA quickly facilitated a convoy to carry food and medical supplies provided by multiple UN agencies to critical priority areas frequently blocked to humanitarian actors owing to insecurity. End comment.

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